

Pronouns

Basics

Pronouns

- A pronoun replaces a noun (or noun phrase) so that the noun does not have to be repeated in other parts of the sentence.
 - *Catherine Morland, the female protagonist in Northanger Abbey, was so affected by her reading of Gothic novels that she looked for a dark secret behind Mrs. Tilney's death.*
 - Here, the pronoun “she” refers to the noun “Catherine Morland”. “Catherine Morland” is the antecedent of “she”. The same goes with “her” instead of “Catherine Morland's”.
- Look carefully whenever you spot different pronoun forms in the answer choices.
 - The error is very common on the GMAT sentence correction.

The Necessity of the Antecedent's Existence

- It is essential for a pronoun to have an antecedent.
- The antecedent must function as a noun in the sentence. A noun functioning as an adjective cannot be the antecedent of a pronoun.
- The noun and pronoun must agree in number.
- The noun-pronoun pair should make sense without any ambiguity.

The Necessity of the Antecedent's Existence

- Identify the error in the following sentence:
 - *Mom and Aunt were cooking dinner, and she led the proceedings.*
 - The error is that it is not clear who led the proceedings.
- The correct sentence:
 - *Mom and Aunt were cooking dinner, and Mom led the proceedings.*
 - Or
 - *Mom and Aunt were cooking dinner, and Aunt led the proceedings.*

The Necessity of the Antecedent's Existence

- Correct the following sentence:

- *The actors said that he cannot come for the shoot today.*

- The plural noun “actors” must be replaced with a plural pronoun “they”.

- *The actors said that they cannot come for the shoot today.*

Or

- *The actor said that he cannot come for the shoot today.*

The Antecedent and the Pronoun Must Make Sense Together

- The antecedent and the pronoun must logically be in agreement. In other words, if the noun is substituted in the place of the pronoun, the sentence must make sense.
- Correct the following sentence:
 - *The publication of the book has been stalled because it attacks the ideologies favored by the ruling party.*
 - The antecedent in the given sentence is “The publication of the book” which obviously will not make sense if substituted in place of the pronoun “it”. Therefore, the sentence needs to be edited so that it makes sense.
 - *The publication of the book has been stalled because the book attacks the ideologies favored by the ruling party.*

The Antecedent and the Pronoun Must Make Sense Together

- The antecedent and the pronoun that refers to it must always agree in number; if the antecedent is singular, the pronoun must be singular and if the antecedent is plural, the pronoun must be plural.
- *The Renaissance artists asserted the significance of classical texts in endeavors at understanding life through his works.*
 - Since the antecedent is “Renaissance artists”, the pronoun should be plural. Alternatively, the term “Renaissance artist” can be used and the pronoun can then be singular.
- *The Renaissance artists asserted the significance of classical texts in endeavors at understanding life through their works.*

Or

- *The Renaissance artist asserted the significance of classical texts in endeavors at understanding life through his works.*

Third Person Personal Pronouns

- Mistakes in the use of third person personal pronouns are common; the singular forms 'it' and 'its', and the plural forms 'they', 'them', and 'their' are often erroneously used. Antecedent-pronoun agreement must always be ensured.
 - *When a **city** suffers with heavy pollution, most of **their** inhabitants are affected.*
 - Antecedent-pronoun agreement needs to be ensured.
 - *When a city suffers with heavy pollution, most of **its** inhabitants are affected.*
- Or
- *When cities suffer with heavy pollution, most of **their** inhabitants are affected.*

Demonstrative Pronouns

- The demonstrative pronouns- 'this', 'that', 'these' and 'those'-can be used as adjectives for nouns they are placed in front of.
- *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* reflects the social rather than political history which lends these book a degree of authenticity.
 - Since “book” (and the antecedent “This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition”) is singular, a singular pronoun, “this”, should be used. The pronoun is functioning as an adjective here.
- *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* reflects the social rather than political history which lends this book a degree of authenticity.

Demonstrative Pronouns – 'That' and 'Those'

- 'That' and 'those' are often used to avoid repetition of the antecedent when making 'copies' of it.
- When 'it', 'they', or other personal pronouns are used, the same antecedent is referred to.
- *The mangoes bought by Rose are riper than those bought by her mother.*
 - The mangoes bought by Rose and the mangoes bought by her mother are not the same. They are 'copies'.
 - “those” refers to the mangoes bought by Rose’s mother.
- *The mangoes bought by Rose are ripe and so they are being used for making ice-cream.*
 - Here, “they” refers to the 'same' mangoes bought by Rose.

Demonstrative Pronouns – 'That' and 'Those'

- 'That' or 'those' indicating a copy or copies of the antecedent must be modified. How the new copy is different from the one first referred to must be mentioned.
- *The motor we bought earlier is **more efficient than** we bought later.*
 - “than that” would be the correct usage.
- *The motor we bought earlier is **more efficient than that** we bought later.*

'This', 'These', 'That', 'Those'

- On the GMAT, 'this' or 'these' should not be used in place of nouns.
- Similarly, 'that' or 'those' should not be used in place of nouns, unless they are suitably modified to make new copies.
- 'It', 'they' or 'them' should be used in place of nouns.
- Correct the following sentence:
 - *The relic is greatly revered; most consider this authentic.*
 - 'This' should not be used in place of a noun.
 - *The relic is greatly revered; most consider it authentic.*

Ambiguity in Pronoun Usage

- Every pronoun in a sentence must clearly refer to an antecedent.
 - Every 'it' and 'its' appearing in a sentence must refer to the same singular antecedent.
 - Every 'they', 'them', and 'their' appearing in a sentence must refer to the same plural antecedent.
- *Poultry farmers must give adequate food and water to the animals so that they remain healthy, and can provide them the desired income.*
 - While it can be understood that “they” refers to the animals and “them” to the farmers, the ambiguity in reference is not acceptable in a correct sentence.
- *Poultry farmers must give adequate food and water to the animals so that the animals remain healthy, and can provide the farmers the desired income.*

Ambiguity in Pronoun Usage

- **Important:** There can be more than one possible antecedent for a single pronoun. On the GMAT, a sentence with more than one possible antecedent for a pronoun is not considered incorrect if only one of those antecedents is reasonable enough in terms of meaning and parallelism.
- *There are three students and five chairs in the classroom; they are each intelligent.*
 - While the pronoun “they” has two possible antecedents- “students” and “chairs”, going by the meaning, it is only “students” that the meaning “they are each intelligent” can apply to and therefore, the sentence does not suffer with pronoun ambiguity and is acceptable.

Ambiguity in Pronoun Usage

- The most important noun in any given sentence is the subject. Therefore, it is the subject that makes the best antecedent.
- *Many painters have used windows in paintings when they have wanted to depict a divide between the public and private worlds.*
 - This sentence is correct. “they” refers to the subject “painters”. There are two other possible antecedents- “windows” and “paintings” but “they” occupies the subject position in the second clause and so will refer to the subject. If the windows (or paintings) are talked about in the next sentence, a phrase such as “these windows (or paintings)” would be used.

Functions for Nouns and Pronouns

- **Subject Pronouns**- 'I', 'you', 'he', 'she', 'it', 'we', 'they', 'who'- can function as subjects of sentences.
 - *I reached in the afternoon.*
- **Object Pronouns**- 'me', 'you', 'him', 'her', 'it', 'us', 'them', 'whom'- can function as objects of verbs or prepositions.
 - *The sermon was read to them.*
- **Possessive Pronouns**- 'my', 'mine', 'your', 'yours', 'his', 'her', 'hers', 'its', 'our', 'ours', 'their', 'theirs', 'whose'- indicate ownership or a similar relation.
 - *His oration was greatly appreciated.*

A Case with Possessive Pronouns

- *The courtiers' dialogues, written by the young playwright, seemed too lofty for them.*
 - In the given sentence, the pronoun “them” refers more to the “dialogues”. Possessive nouns can be antecedents only to possessive pronouns (example: “courtiers’ ” and “their” make a fine pair). So, removing the possessive noun is a good option. To avoid ambiguity entirely, the pronoun itself should be replaced by a suitable noun.
- *The dialogues for the courtiers, written by the young playwright, seemed too lofty for those courtiers.*

A Generate Note

- Much of GMAT material lays unnecessarily high emphasis on pronoun ambiguity as a crucial eliminating factor. Practically, in several cases, what appears to be pronoun ambiguity, is actually isn't so for the reasons explained in the previous slides. A very small proportion of questions test pronouns alone and generally, this concept is tested together with other concepts. Unless the pronoun error is absolutely apparent, look for other, more fundamental reasons (modifier, subject-verb agreement, parallelism, comparison, and tenses) for eliminating the answer choices. Only when you are left with the final 2-3 answer choices and you have to take a nuanced look should you consider pronoun ambiguity worth an 'eliminating factor'.

Special Cases

'There' as a Pronoun

- 'There', meaning 'in that place', is actually an adverb, but can also function like a pronoun.
- The antecedent (of 'there') is often contained in a prepositional phrase. This antecedent should be a noun (names of places are nouns).
 - *As people in Nepal needed help in the time of the natural calamity, troops from the Indian army were sent **there**.*
- In certain cases, where 'there' functions only as a 'dummy' pronoun, an antecedent is not needed.
 - *There are fresh flowers in the vase.*

'Itself' and 'Themselves' as Pronouns

- 'Itself' and 'themselves' function as objects, and refer directly to the subject.
 - These reflexive pronouns are used in cases wherein the subject acts upon itself.
 - When another pronoun is used, there should be no ambiguity in comprehending the meaning.
 - *When the event was to be organized, the party advertised it.*
 - “it” refers to the “event”.
 - *When the event was to be organized, the party advertised itself.*
 - “itself” refers to the “party”.
- “Itself” and “themselves” can also be used for the purpose of intensifying the nouns.
 - *The perpetrators themselves had been victims once.*

'One Another' and 'Each Other' as Pronouns

- When interaction between parties is being talked about, the reciprocal pronouns 'one another' and 'each other' are used.
 - *The two competitors respected each other.*
 - *Competitors must respect one another.*
- Each other is used for two entities, one another for more than two entities.
- Remember that these two pronouns cannot be interchanged with 'themselves'.
 - *The children exchanged gifts with themselves.* – Incorrect
 - *The children exchanged gifts with one another.* - Correct

'One Another' and 'Each Other' as Pronouns

- Correct the following sentence:
 - *The two partners of the firm discussed with themselves the pros and cons of taking up the new project.*
 - *The two partners of the firm discussed with each other the pros and cons of taking up the new project.*
- Correct the following sentence:
 - *The five partners of the firm discussed with themselves the pros and cons of taking up the new project.*
 - *The five partners of the firm discussed with one another the pros and cons of taking up the new project.*

'Such' and 'Other' as Pronouns

- 'Such' and 'other'/'another', together with a noun, refer to an antecedent.
 - 'Such' is used in these cases to mean 'like the antecedent'.
 - *After the huge losses suffered in the wake of last year's mishap, the required steps have been taken to mitigate damages if any **such mishap** were to occur in the future.*
- 'Other' and 'another' may not mean 'exactly like', but they mean 'additional of the same type'.
 - *After Stephen did exceedingly well on the important project, the management decided to give him the responsibility of handling **other projects** of considerable importance.*
 - *After Stephen did exceedingly well on the important project, the management decided to give him the responsibility of handling **another project** of strategic importance.*

'One' as a Pronoun

- To refer to an indefinite copy or an indefinite part of a collection, the word 'one' is used.
- The personal pronouns 'it' and 'they'/ 'them', in contrast, are used to refer to a definite object or a definite entire collection.
- Please refer to examples on the next slide.

'One' as a Pronoun

- *A single look at the cute little kittens was enough to make Mary adopt one.*
 - A particular kitten has not been pointed out.
- *A single look at the cute little kittens was enough to make Mary adopt them.*
 - This sentence indicates that all the kittens were adopted by Mary.
- *A single look at the cute little kittens was enough to make Mary adopt one; it seemed as glad to be held by Mary as Mary was to hold it.*
 - The definite pronoun 'it' is used for referring to the particular kitten that has been bought by Mary.

'One' v/s 'You'

- The pronouns 'one' and 'you' are often used while giving others advice or making general statements.
 - It is important to ensure that the two are not mixed up.
- Identify the error in the following sentence:
 - *If one is not ready to work hard, you should not be surprised at scoring poorly.*
- The correct statement should read:
 - *If one is not ready to work hard, one should not be surprised at scoring poorly.*
 - Or
 - *If you are not ready to work hard, you should not be surprised at scoring poorly.*
 - Or
 - *If one is not ready to work hard, he or she should not be surprised at scoring poorly.*

'Do so' as a Pronoun

- 'Do so' can indicate an action in its entirety- not just the verb but also its objects and modifiers. 'Do so' functions like a pronoun in that it refers to an earlier part of the sentence. Since it takes the place of a verb or predicate (part of a sentence that contains a verb/verb phrase), 'do so' is a 'pro-verb'.
- Make suitable changes to the following sentence:
 - *Alice did not apologize for her fault although her mother insisted that she apologize for her fault.*
 - 'Do so' can refer to the action in its entirety. Repetition of the part of the sentence that first indicates the action is not required.
 - *Alice did not apologize for her fault although her mother insisted that she did so.*
- Just the helping verb can also be repeated without the word 'so'.
 - *Alice did not apologize for her fault although her mother insisted that she did.*

'Do it' as a Pronoun

- 'Do it' is used when there is an actual noun antecedent that 'it' can refer to.
 - *Maria failed to complete the task so Julia did it.*
 - “it” refers to “the task”.
- Another verb can also be used in place of 'do'. 'It' will, of course, refer to the noun antecedent.
 - *Maria failed to complete the task so Julia **completed** it.*

'Which' v/s 'That'

- 'That' and 'which' fall under the category of relative pronouns as they are used to relate different parts of a sentence.
- On the GMAT, 'which' is not essential for identifying the subject. It serves the purpose of explaining or adding to what the sentence mainly says. Generally, the phrase starting with 'which' can be removed from the sentence without affecting the essential intended meaning.
 - *The tattered copy of “The Complete Works of William Shakespeare”, which had great many markings done in pencil, was among Stella’s loved possessions.*

'Which' v/s 'That'

- For 'which' to be correct on the GMAT, remember:
 - It must come after a comma, AND
 - It must refer to the noun that immediately precedes the comma.
- The sentence '*The last book on the shelf, which has a red cover, was gifted to me by my mother.*' is incorrect.
 - Even though which comes after a comma, it has an incorrect referent. The phrase starting with “which” is meant to refer to the “last book”, not to the “shelf”.
- However, in cases where 'which' is preceded by some preposition, a comma is not needed before 'which'.
 - The sentence '*The tank from which the water is flowing is dirty.*' is correct even though no comma precedes 'which'.

'Which' v/s 'That'

- On the GMAT, 'that' is essential for identifying the subject. Thus, the part starting with 'that' cannot be removed from the sentence.
- Identify the difference between these two sentences.
 - *The second vase, which is red in color, is a beautiful one.*
 - *The second vase that is red in color is a beautiful one.*
 - The first sentence is referring to the second vase and we are provided with the additional information that it is red in color. Even without the information, we know it is the second vase that is being referred to.
 - The second sentence takes you to the second red vase. This could be the second vase (in case the first one is also red) or it could be fifth or tenth, as long as it satisfies the criterion of being the second red vase.

'Who' v/s 'Whom'

A frequently tested concept on the GMAT.

- 'Who' is a subject- the one performing the action.
- 'Whom' is an object- the one that receives the action. (Action is performed on/for the object.)
- **NOTE:** If the answer to who/whom is I, he, she, etc., the correct word is 'who'. If the answer is me, him, her, etc., the correct word is 'whom'.
- After a preposition, 'whom' (not 'who') is right. For instance, we use 'with whom', 'one of whom', etc.

'Who' v/s 'Whom'

- Pick the correct word:
 - *Who/whom is coming to the picnic?*
 - *Who/whom is this song about?*
- Who *is coming to the picnic?*
 - The answer will be a subject- he, she, some proper noun for a person, etc.
- Whom *is this song about?*
 - The answer will be an object- him, her, etc.

'It's' v/s 'Its'

- 'It's' means 'it is'.
- 'Its' is the possessive form of
- Pick the correct word:
 - *The dog was wagging it's/its tail.*
 - *It's/it's a hot day.*
 - *The dog was wagging its tail.*
 - *It's a hot day.*

Placeholder 'It'

- At times, changing how the subject or object has been placed can make the sentence sound better. In such cases, 'it' can be placed where the subject or object originally was. This use is referred to as Placeholder 'It'.
- Do not search for a noun antecedent for a Placeholder 'It'.
- *It is Stephen's obligation that he explain his actions to his guardians.*
- "It" here does not here demand an antecedent; the sentence could also have been written as "Stephen's obligation is that he explain his actions to his guardians".

Placeholder 'It' in Postponing Infinitive Subjects

- On the GMAT, Placeholder 'It' is used while postponing infinitive subjects.
- Even if the sentence is grammatically correct, the GMAT prefers to avoid the use of a sentence in which the subject is an infinitive phrase. 'It' is made the grammatical subject which refers to the infinitive phrase (initially the subject). Remember that usually, 'it' cannot refer to an infinitive.
 - Find an example on the next slide.

Placeholder 'It' in Postponing Infinitive Subjects

- *To waste resources is criminal.*
- The same sentence can also be written as...
 - *It is criminal to waste resources.*
 - “It”, as the grammatical subject, refers to the infinitive phrase “to waste resources”.

Postponing 'That-' Clause Subjects

- Since 'that'-clauses contain subjects and verbs, they can function as nouns. Therefore, sentences that have 'that'-clauses as subjects are grammatically correct.
- However, the GMAT prefers a 'that'-clause subject to be postponed. Remember that usually, 'it' cannot refer to a clause.

○ *That the depiction was beautiful was asserted by all who viewed the painting.*

Or

○ *It was asserted by all who viewed the painting that the depiction was beautiful.*

Postponing 'That-' Clause Subjects

- It is possible for a sentence with 'that'-clause subject to be the correct answer on the GMAT. Always ensure that there are no major grammatical errors.
 - *That we executed the task efficiently gave us immense confidence.*
- The sentence can also be written as...
 - *It gave us immense confidence that we executed the task efficiently.*
- Both the sentences are correct.

Postponing Infinitive or 'That-' Clause Objects

- If the given sentence contains a Placeholder 'It' and an infinitive object, the verb in the infinitive phrase is changed into an action noun and the Placeholder 'It' is dropped. The rest of the sentence is accordingly altered.
- Suitably rephrase the sentence:
 - *The directive made it possible for them to construct the building at that site.*
 - *The directive made possible the construction of the building at that site.*
 - Or
 - *The directive made the construction of the building at that site possible.*

Eliminating Pronouns

- In certain cases, eliminating pronouns is a good option. To take an example, when a pronoun such as 'it' or 'them' appears at the end of a long sentence, there might be ambiguity relating to which antecedent is being referred to and the pronoun should, therefore, be eliminated in order to remove that ambiguity.
- To remove the ambiguity, the antecedent noun can be repeated, even though this does not make the final sentence sound very good.
- Please refer to an example on the next slide.

Eliminating Pronouns

- Correct the following sentence:

- *After escaping the prison at midnight, the convict slept in the nearby graveyard and the next day, ran as far away from it as he could.*

- “it” can be assumed to refer to “the prison” but could also reasonably refer to the “graveyard”.

- *After escaping the prison at midnight, the convict slept in the nearby graveyard and the next day, ran as far away from the prison as he could.*

Eliminating Pronouns

- Another way (more preferred on the GMAT) is to replace 'it' with a generic synonym for the antecedent. This synonym functions like a pronoun. It is more general than the antecedent, which is an example of the generic synonym.
 - *The contracts the firm had signed with different clients were given to the new manager so that he could read those documents.*
 - “documents” is a generic synonym for “contracts”, which are types of documents.
- Words such as 'these', 'those', 'such' need not always precede generic synonyms. A lot of times, 'the' may suffice.
 - *The forts of the dynasty were so marvelously constructed that enthusiasts of architectural studies on their visits to the dynasty's ruling centers found it hard to leave the premises of the monuments.*

Nuances of Pronoun Reference

- The suitability of a noun as an antecedent for a particular pronoun is determined by several factors, the most important among which is number and gender agreement.
 - The antecedent must agree in number with the pronoun.
 - The antecedent must have the same gender as the pronoun.
 - Remember:
 - 'He' and 'his' are masculine;
 - 'She', 'her', and 'hers' are feminine;
 - 'It' and 'its' are neutral; and
 - 'They', 'them', and 'their' can be used for any gender.

Nuances of Pronoun Reference

- When pronouns are repeated in a given sentence, they must refer to the same antecedent. Keeping the number principle in mind, you can understand that this means that every 'it' and 'its' in the sentence must refer to the same singular noun and every 'they', 'them' and 'their' must refer to the same plural noun.
- *The short animated film beautifully depicted how the little bird learnt its lesson in independence as it observed the young of other creatures learning to function with self-sufficiency.*
- *The members of the armed forces did their service to their country as they risked themselves to save others.*
 - In the first sentence, both “its” and “it” refer to the singular noun “the little bird”. In the second sentence, “their” (both the uses), “they”, and “themselves” refer to the plural “members of the armed forces”.

Nuances of Pronoun Reference

- The antecedent is usually placed before the pronoun. It is rare but not grammatically incorrect for an antecedent to be placed after the pronoun.
- For example:
 - *After he won the election, Michael gave a speech.*
 - The sentence is acceptable.

Nuances of Pronoun Reference

- If they are placed in parallel structures, the pronoun and its antecedent should agree in case. A pronoun in subject position in one clause, for instance, should refer to a noun in subject position in a parallel clause.
- Nouns in subject positions generally make strong antecedents, even if the pronouns happen to be distant.
- **Note:** On the GMAT, antecedent ambiguity is not usually a determining factor in choosing the correct option.

Nuances of Pronoun Reference

- Correct the following sentence:

- *The university now enjoys great prestige because of the excellent quality of its faculty and students, its research facilities, and the skill set it develops, despite the fact that they were just recently established and have to compete with renowned universities that were established decades ago.*
- *The university now enjoys great prestige because of the excellent quality of its faculty and students, its research facilities, and the skill set it develops, despite the fact that it was just recently established and has to compete with renowned universities that were established decades ago.*

Nuances of Pronoun Reference

- In the original sentence on the last slide...
 - For the pronoun 'it', the antecedent has to be singular and neutral in terms of gender. In the given sentence, the two 'its' and 'it' obviously refer to 'the university'. In the first clause, therefore, there is no ambiguity.
 - In the second clause, however, the pronoun in the subject position is plural and is not in agreement with the singular antecedent appearing in the first clause. The pronouns and helping verbs need to be changed.

thank you



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